

Wireless Priority Service

Purpose: The goal of the Wireless Priority Service (WPS) is to provide an end-to-end nationwide wireless priority communications capability to key national security and emergency preparedness (NS/EP) personnel during natural or man-made disasters or emergencies that cause congestion or network outages in the Public Switched Network (PSN). Eligible users are key federal, state, tribal, county and local government and critical industry personnel who have NS/EP missions. This service is complementary to, and expected to be used in conjunction with, the Government Emergency Telecommunications Service (GETS) to ensure a high probability of call completions in both the wireline and wireless portions of the PSN. WPS serves national security and emergency preparedness needs while minimizing impact on consumer access to the public wireless infrastructure.

Background: Increased cellular phone usage by the general public in emergency situations regularly results in extreme network congestion, preventing key national security and emergency response personnel from obtaining network access. In emergency situations when wireline networks are damaged, cellular telephones often provide the primary means of communication, increasing congestion even further. In the year 2000, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) issued a Report and Order (R&O) for Priority Access Service (PAS) authorizing wireless carriers to offer the service on a voluntary basis and with much needed liability protections. Following the September 11 attacks, the White House directed delivery of a wireless priority service to persons with leadership responsibilities during emergency situations.

Highlights:

- WPS is an enhancement to basic cellular service that allows NS/EP calls to queue for the next available radio channel. The initial capability provides this queuing on the origination of the cellular call. The full WPS capability, which began deployment in early 2004, when used with GETS, will provide priority handling from the origination, through the network, to the called destination.
- WPS is invoked by dialing *272 prior to the destination number on cellular instruments that have been subscribed to the WPS feature.
- WPS costs are a \$10 one-time activation fee, a \$4.50 per month service fee, and \$.75 per minute for WPS (*272) calls. WPS charges are in addition to the basic subscription charges of the carrier. WPS minutes are not charged against the basic service minutes.
- WPS is available nationwide in most T-Mobile service areas. AT&T Wireless, Cingular, and Nextel currently offer WPS in selective markets. Additional coverage areas are planned during 2004 and will be announced when they become operational. Verizon Wireless and Sprint PCS are planning to offer WPS when modifications to their technology can be made, estimated for 2006. For the latest information on WPS carriers and markets, see "Carriers" on <http://wps.ncs.gov>.
- Applications for pre-approval of the WPS feature are being accepted for markets that do not have WPS. To pre-subscribe, see "Request WPS" on <http://wps.ncs.gov>. After the request is approved, it will be held for submission to the carrier as soon as they have WPS enabled on their network in the requested service area. At this time, we are not accepting pre-approval requests for Verizon Wireless and Sprint PCS.

Contact Information: Additional information may be obtained by contacting WPS Operations & Administration at (703) 676-CALL or (866) NCS-CALL, choose Option 2. ♦ Fax: (703) 848-0299 or (888) 862-4222 ♦ Web Site: <http://wps.ncs.gov> ♦ E-mail: WPS@dhs.gov ♦ The WPS Program Office can be contacted at (703) 607-6118.